

8 Lawrence St, Charlestown

Documentary evidence suggests a build date between 1813¹-1845, we believe the house was built 1813-1814 to accommodate the owner's new and growing family. 8 Lawrence St is one of the two extant dwelling houses in the area that were amongst the earliest built in the area, contributing to the development and rebuilding of the neighborhood post the burning of the town during the Battle of Bunker Hill. The parcel for 8 Lawrence was carved from land that was "speculated for development" in



Figure 1 Digital Image, 8 Lawrence St by CPS 20 Jul 2020

1808. The considerable mid-20th c renovations that significantly alter the ground floor fenestration pattern makes a finding of significance problematic.

However, Charlestown has seen numerous rehabilitation examples in which owners have removed cladding to the basic sheathing to reveal earlier window patterns and dimensions. In some cases, owners have retained the earliest pattern and dimensions in their renovations. The scale of this dwelling house and the preserved brick end walls make this house a good candidate for rehabilitation rather than demolition.

8 Lawrence Street resides in the Union Street Neighborhood Design Overlay District² and the building of the dwelling house directly contributed to the initial development of the Union Street / Washington Streets area and the speculative development 1800-1820 of a 20-acre tract known as "Lyndes Point" (later "Prison Point") by Captain Archibald McNeil, rope walk and land owner. "From 1804 to 1815, McNeil subdivided his property into house lots, purchased and developed by some of Charlestown's most prominent families."³ James McGee purchased a portion of this land valued at \$40,000 and continued the sale of parcels. The 8 Lawrence street parcel of land was conveyed from McNeil to McGee in 1808⁴ and McGee to Fosdick in 1813⁵. Fosdick also acquired an abutting parcel of

¹ Middlesex County Deeds Book 205 Page 49-50 and 333. Land Sale from McGee to Fosdick and Building Mortgage from Field to Fosdick, both in 1813.

² Boston Redevelopment Authority, Charlestown Zoning Code Article 62 – Charlestown Neighborhood District. Accessed 21 Jul 2020

https://library.municode.com/ma/boston/codes/redevelopment_authority?nodeId=ART62CHNEDI

³ IBID Section 62-19 Paragraph 4

⁴ Middlesex Book of Deeds 177 Page 327-334, Archibald McNeil to James McGee

⁵ Middlesex Book of Deeds 205 Page 333, James McGee to James Fosdick

land on Lawrence Street from Appollos Field⁶ on a “new street in Charlestown leading to Baptist Church”⁷.

James⁷ Fosdick (1789-1854) built No.8 Lawrence Street. James⁷ Fosdick was a chair-maker [lineage James⁷, David⁶, James⁵, Samuel⁴, Samuel³, John², Stephen¹]. His parents were David⁶ Fosdick (1757-1812) and Mary Frothingham (1758-1848). Mary was the daughter of James Frothingham (1735-1820), who was deacon of the First Church in Charlestown on Town Hill. Her brother, James Frothingham Jr. (1763-1848) married Sally Fosdick. In 1811 James⁷ Fosdick married Sophia Goodell. As was customary, we believe he built his home to house his family shortly after his marriage. His first daughter was born in 1812 and first son in 1813 and ultimately another 6 children. Wife Sophia died in 1833 and James⁷ Fosdick kept the house until 1845 when his eighth child, a daughter, became 23-years of age. James⁷ Fosdick is laid to rest in a vault at the historic Phipps Street Burying Ground in Charlestown, where Lawrence Street ends at Phipps Street.



Figure 2 Digital Image, Original Photo May 1936 Library of Congress. Accessed 21 Jul 2020 <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/ma0926.photos.076732p/resource/>

Apparently, No. 8 Lawrence Street was built around the same time as No.30 Union Street, which is on an adjoining house lot at the beginning of Lawrence Street on the corner of Union Street. Vintage photograph of these 2 houses is attached, with one chimney end-wall of No. 8 Lawrence Street appearing at rear far right. In 1845, the house lot of 8 Lawrence extended 43' along Lawrence Street, 44' 3" on the southwest, and 37' on the northwest. The rear lot line travelled 18' NW, turned to the NE for 10' 2", then turned NW again, there running 23'.⁸ In 1868 the dwelling house consisted of a 2 story wood building with brick end walls and an ell – the portion nearest the main block 1.5 stories that terminates in a single story. An 1868 map shows that the configuration of the ell was offset from the main house block, and different than what exists today. A 1957 building permit for the removal of a brick ell indicates the main house is 30' x 20'. The ell may have been reconstructed multiple times.

⁶ Ibid Page 333

⁷ Ibid Page 50

⁸ Middlesex Book of Deeds 461 Page 333, James Fosdick to Rebecca Estabrook

Development of this area was active in the early 1800's with the construction of at least 10 prominent houses between 1809 and 1820. (117 Old Rutherford Ave, 37 Austin St (demolished 1960's), 16 Harvard St, 121 and 123 Main Street, 41 and 43 Austin St, and 25 Harvard Sq.) Very few of these historic buildings exist today, largely due to Urban Renewal plans for Charlestown.



Figure 3 Digital Image, Screenshot 1868 Atlas accessed 22 Jul 2020. www.atlascope.leventhalmap.org

The CLG / Boston Landmarks Commission recommendation for a Town Hill National Register district expansion included 8-20 Lawrence St.

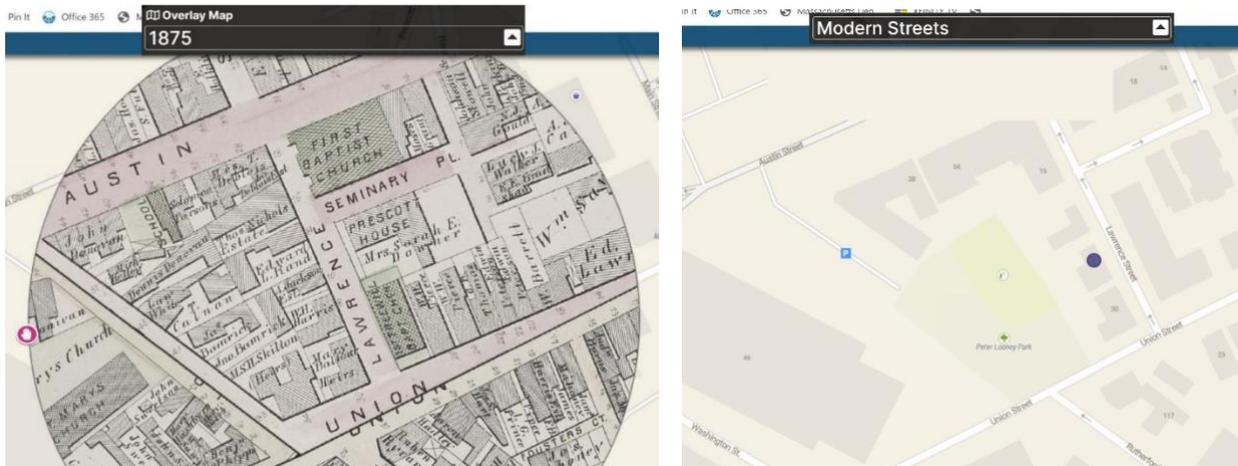


Figure 2 Digital Image, Screenshot of 1875 Atlas. Accessed 22 Jul 2020. www.atlascope.leventhalmap.org. Modern Street view shows 8 Lawrence and 30 Union remain.